

46th anniversary of Earth Day, which was started by our former colleague Senator Gaylord Nelson. He did that because he recognized it is important for this country to recognize our global responsibilities to our environment and to our future.

There is no greater challenge that we face than climate change because climate change has been caused, in part, by our own activities here on Earth, by the emission of greenhouse gases. We have a responsibility to reverse the current trends. We can do that.

Tomorrow in New York City, many leaders will come to sign the COP21 agreement that was negotiated in Paris earlier this year by 16 nations representing 98 percent of the global greenhouse emissions. This is a historic moment.

I want to reflect for a moment about the U.S. leadership that has brought us to this moment in which we now have an agreement among so many countries of the world. We have been trying to do this now for a long time. We have not been successful. At last, the global community has come together with meaningful commitments that will put us on the right path, and the U.S. leadership made this possible.

I want to congratulate President Obama for his leadership on this. I was with Secretary Moniz in Paris. Ten members of the U.S. Senate went to Paris during the COP21 negotiations. We were there less than 48 hours, but I think we were able to broadcast the united support for U.S. leadership for a global commitment.

Secretary of Energy Moniz took us to the exhibit where we saw firsthand U.S. technology that will help us meet the challenges of climate change—how we can produce energy more efficiently and how we can use energy more efficiently. It was U.S. technology, and that technology will be used around the world.

I mention that because U.S. global leadership is critically important to help save our planet from the adverse impacts of climate change, yes, but it also will help our economy. It will help our economy, obviously, in dealing with the effects of climate change but also in U.S. technology being used around the world, creating jobs here in the United States.

This is an urgent issue. If I might, let me first quote from Pope Francis. He said:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. . . . I urgently appeal, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. . . . Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.

I couldn't agree with him more. This is a global challenge with global, grave consequences if we don't get it right.

I see that in my own State of Maryland's Smith Island, which is disappearing into the Chesapeake Bay. I see it in the Chesapeake Bay with the loss of sea grasses because of warmer water temperatures. Sea grasses are critically important to the survival of the Maryland blue crab. I see it in our coastal safety, as we see more and more storms with more consequences.

Recently I traveled to the southern part of Africa, and I had a chance to see from a helicopter the impact of climate change. In the southern part of Africa, they have only two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. They are now at about one season: the dry season. We were there during the rainy season, and by helicopter we flew over land that should have been part of a pond. Instead, it was dry, no water. We saw the carcasses of animals that couldn't survive because of the drought.

Climate change is real and is affecting our planet. There are vulnerable nations—from the Marshall Islands to Bangladesh and so many others—whose very existence is at risk because of climate change.

This is an urgent issue that requires an urgent response. But here we can make a difference. We can make a difference through conserving and using less energy and producing our energy in a more environmentally friendly way in a carbon-free environment.

I am joined by Congressman DELANEY and many Members of both the House and Senate in saying that the United States should make a commitment to produce at least 50 percent of our electricity through a carbon-free source by the year 2030. We can do that.

Here is the good news. It will not only be good for our environment, it will be good for our economy and good for our national security. Renewable energy sources can be produced here in America. You don't have to depend on the fossil fuels from countries who disagree with our way of life. For the sake of our national security, for the sake of our national economy, there are more jobs in clean energy than there are in fossil fuel industry.

For all those reasons—for our economy, for our security, and for our environment—U.S. leadership in dealing with these solutions can help America's security. Yes, U.S. leadership is absolutely vital. We saw that in COP21. Without U.S. leadership, it could not be done.

Here is where I really call upon our colleagues. I have said this many times on the floor of the Senate. It is a great honor to serve in the Senate; it is a great honor to represent the people of Maryland. Every Congress has tried to add to its record to protect the future generations as it relates to our environment.

The protection of our environment has never been a partisan issue. I would

urge our colleagues to find ways that we can work together to build the legacy of this Congress to further protect our environment for future generations. We should be part of the solution.

Tomorrow is Earth Day. Let's make a difference. With what we see happening in New York and by our actions, let us protect future generations.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator ALEXANDER, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order to call up the following first-degree amendments: Merkley amendment No. 3812, Reid amendment No. 3805, and Flake amendment No. 3820; further, that at 11 a.m., on Tuesday, April 26, the Senate vote on the amendments in the order listed and with no second-degree amendments in order prior to the votes, and that there be 2 minutes equally divided prior to each vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT SIGNING AND EARTH DAY

Mr. DURBIN. Some may know that there is a section of the Washington Post called the Kids Post—a section of interesting stories written for kids in the Washington area. The writers ask area grade schoolers about their favorite books, tv shows, hobbies, and sports. Sometimes the kids are asked what they think is one of the biggest problems in the world. Last week, a fifth-grade class in Virginia was asked this question.

About half the class mentioned an environmental problem such as global warming. In other recent editions when this question was asked, climate change is something these young people consistently worry about. It only makes sense.

Failure to do anything about climate change today, when we still have a chance, will leave future generations—our grandchildren and their children—with a changed world—and not for the better.

I know every time I look at my beautiful young grandchildren, I feel a responsibility—a moral responsibility—